

Learning To See

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[0:00] Our scripture reading will be coming from Luke 24, a very familiar story that's generally preached around Easter after the resurrection.

! It takes place the very day Jesus is resurrected. Two discouraged disciples are leaving Jerusalem convinced that all hope had been shattered.

! And what follows is an account as the risen Lord knows that all hope had been shattered. And meets them on the road and begins to ask them questions and open their eyes that they could not see.

So our scripture comes from Luke 24, 13 to 35, but I'm only going to be reading 13 to 27 to start us off.

So hear God's word. That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

[1:04] While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, what is this conversation that you're holding with each other as you walk?

And they stood still looking sad. Then one of them named Cleopas answered, are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?

And he said to them, what things? And they said to him, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a mighty prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him.

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, this is now the third day since these things happened.

However, some of our women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had seen, even seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.

[2:21] Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see. And he said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Was it not necessary that the trice should suffer these things and enter into his glory and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.

This is God's word. Amen. Let us pray. Our gracious God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you and we praise you for your word, which is able to eliminate our minds and our hearts, and we're so grateful for that, and we so desperately need for you to open our eyes because we can't see, even when you're walking next to us.

It's almost funny if it wasn't so sad. I pray now, Lord, that you would illuminate our minds and our eyes as you illuminate your scriptures and use me to do that job.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. You may be seated. Back in July, I preached a sermon entitled, Open the Eyes of My Heart.

[4:05] In it, I looked at what Paul prayed in Ephesians 1, where he prayed that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him having the eyes of your heart enlightened.

Now, we were reminded that the Ephesian Christians were Christians already. He had told them about adoption and their redemption and forgiveness and that they were sealed by the Holy Spirit.

But Paul prays that their eyes of their heart might be enlightened. Even though they had all this theological truth, even though they knew that God was sovereign, even though they knew that God was with them always, Paul prays that their eyes of their heart might be enlightened, that they might see in practical everyday life how this applies, not just in their minds.

And I think one of the clearest examples of what Paul prays about is in the Emmaus story. On a seven-mile road trip, not probably, in the desert, there's a walk between Jerusalem and Emmaus, a little village, and two disciples are walking there.

And they know all the facts. They know everything that had happened. They know that Jesus was crucified. They know that he was a prophet, mighty in word and deed.

[5:45] They knew that the tomb was empty. They even knew that some of the women claimed that angels said that he was alive. They had all this information, but they could not see that Jesus was walking right there with them.

Luke tells us something very interesting. He says, But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. You know, this is a great mystery.

Their eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus, yet Jesus rebuked them for not seeing. The interesting thing is that only God can open our eyes, yet we are responsible for believing what he says, not necessarily what our eyes see.

We cannot manufacture spiritual light, but we can repent of the stories that we trust in instead of trusting in God's word. Think about it.

The very person they were grieving was walking with them. The very answers to their confusion was listening to their question. The very hope they thought they had lost was closer than they imagined.

[6:58] They could not see him. Their problem was not that Jesus was not there. Their problem was that their eyes were closed.

And if we're honest, that describes for us how we think often. We walk through disappointment, wondering where is God?

We walk through suffering, asking why hasn't Jesus shown up? We walk through confusion, thinking this is not the story I thought God was telling.

The Emmaus road teaches us that sometimes Jesus is closer than we think. Sometimes God is doing his deepest work when we can't recognize his hand.

Sometimes the problem is not that reality needs to change. Often the problem is that we need our eyes to be open to reality so that we can see the truth.

[8:01] So today, we're going to look at the story of the road to Emmaus and what it has to teach us about seeing. And I titled the sermon, Learning to See.

Or, open the eyes of our heart, part two. Because the greatest thing that we need that God can give us is not always to change the road that we're walking on.

The greatest thing that God can do for us is to teach us to see who is walking with us. So, how does God open our eyes?

Open the eyes of our heart. First of all, God opens our eyes by exposing the story that we're living in. Jesus comes alongside these disciples and asks them a simple question.

What is the conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk? Now, Jesus knows full well what they're talking about. He's not asking the question because He doesn't know but He's asking the question for their sake so they can begin to think.

[9:12] They need revelation. You know, this is often what God does, doesn't He? He asks us questions that we might think. He goes to Adam and He says, where are you?

Now, He knew where Adam was but He wanted Adam to know where he was. You know, who told you you were naked? You were naked before. Something happened. Who told you you were naked?

Where are you getting your story from? Adam, he goes to Cain and he asks, where's your brother? Now, Cain knew what he did to his brother.

Where's your brother? Am I my brother's keeper? What have you done? Think. God asks questions so that we can think about where we get our stories.

These disciples needed to hear the story they were telling themselves and to summarize the story that they were telling themselves can be summarized in four words.

[10:17] But we had hoped. We had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel. In other words, they created these stories about how Jesus was supposed to be.

He was to, they thought He was the answer and they had plotted out a story. They thought He was going to execute things in a certain way. But now the cross happens.

They were disappointed because they expected something very different from Jesus. They had a lot of right beliefs. They rightly believed that Jesus came to bring victory, right?

They rightly believed that Jesus came to bring redemption. They rightly believed that Jesus was the Messiah. But they just didn't understand God's story.

They thought the cross had ended the story, that it was failure. But the cross was the very place Jesus was succeeding. They looked at the greatest victory in human history and called it defeat.

[11:20] Why? Because their eyes were closed. And everyone in here has a sentence that begins with we had hoped.

We had hoped that our marriage would be different. We had hoped that the cancer would not come back. We had hoped that our children would turn out differently.

We had hoped that retirement would be different. We had hoped, we had hoped how many times do we say that when our stories don't end the way they're supposed to.

And Jesus graciously asked all of us tell me the story that you're living in. Because many times our deepest pain doesn't come from what's happening to us.

But it comes from the collision between God's story and the story we thought he was writing. So the first step in learning to see is admitting Lord maybe I don't see reality as clearly as I thought I did.

[12:34] Please Lord open my eyes. Second point God opens our eyes by teaching us his story.

Not history but his story. Jesus responds to their disappointment with these words oh foolish ones you remember a fool says in his heart there is no God.

oh foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. This sounds kind of harsh after all their eyes were closed how could you rebuke them when their eyes were closed?

Because their problem was a refusal to believe the scriptures. Their problem was a heart that was slow to trust what God has already revealed.

You know they had developed a theology but it was slightly deficient. They understood parts of the Old Testament scripture. They understood the glory of God.

[13:39] They had categories for victory and redemption and the Messiah but they had left out a category that we often leave out too. They left out the category of suffering.

So Jesus asked them a question in verse 26 was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter his glory?

Notice the word necessary. Jesus did not deny that they were in pain and they were struggling. But he corrects their theology.

He corrects their interpretation of scripture. They believed that the cross meant that God's plan had failed. Jesus tells them that the cross was necessary for God's plan to be fulfilled.

The cross was not an interruption of God's plan. It was not plan B. it was something that God had planned from the beginning.

[14:40] The very events that they interpreted as defeat was the means by which God used to bring about his glory. So verse 27.

Beginning with Moses Genesis and all the prophets he interpreted to them all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

That must have been a very interesting Bible study. Jesus is saying that you've been reading the scriptures but you're missing the whole point of the scriptures. The scriptures are about me.

From the very beginning Genesis 3:15 God had promised that the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent but in doing so his heel would be bruised and he would be wounded. So from the very beginning there was a pointing to Jesus the cross was not God's backup plan. It was his plan from the very beginning.

[15:44] Maybe he took him to Genesis 22 the story of Abraham and Isaac. We all know the story of how God told Abraham to take his son Isaac and to make a sacrifice of him and Isaac says as they're walking you know the fires here and the wood is here but where is the sacrifice?

And Abraham says God will provide. And I don't know if Abraham knew exactly what was going to happen but he knew that God would provide. And there as they're walking up the mountain there in the thicket is a lamb.

And we all know right by now that that little lamb was a pointer to the real lamb that would be sacrificed for sins. Maybe he took him to Exodus 12.

Maybe it's the Passover. Israel was going to leave the clutches of Egypt and the firstborn was going to be stricken. And God told him every household take a lamb and cut the lamb and take the blood of that lamb and put it over the doorpost and the angel of death will pass over that door.

We know that the blood of lamb doesn't do anything but we know that that blood pointed to a greater blood that was going to be bled. A thousand years later maybe he took him to Isaiah that talks about the suffering servant.

[17 : 20] He may have said that you expected the Messiah to conquer with force to take over Rome but Isaiah remember said that he would be pierced for our transgressions and bear our sins.

Maybe he took him to Psalm 16 about the resurrection. David declared that the Holy One would not see decay. The grave could not hold Jesus because the Father had promised the resurrection before it happened.

Jesus reinterprets reality through God's word. And that's how our eyes are open. Not by looking deeper into ourselves and meditating on a word but by looking at God's word interpreting reality for us.

We learn to see by allowing Jesus words to tell us what is really happening. The Bible does not just give us information.

sometimes we just think it gives us good theology and a lot of things to do. But the Bible is telling us what God has done and is doing and will do.

[18 : 36] So, God opens our eyes by exposing the stories we're living in. God opens our eyes by teaching us His story. But thirdly, God opens our eyes by helping us recognize His presence.

See, the story continues in verse 28, in Luke 24, when it says, So they drew near to the village to which they were going.

He acted as if He was going further, but they urged Him strongly, saying, Stay with us, for it is towards evening and the day is now spent. So they went in to stay with Him.

When He was at table with them, He took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them.

And verse 31, And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him and He disappeared from their sight.

Finally, they see. Here's the amazing thing. Jesus had been with them all long. Before they saw Him or understood, before they had all the answers, Jesus was already walking with them.

[19 : 46] The resurrection was already true. The victory was already accomplished. They had hoped, but their hope was already fulfilled.

Their feelings were real. I'm not making fun of them because that's where we all live. Their grief was real. Their confusion was real. And saints, my brothers and sisters, this is the nature of the Christian life.

We all live between what we can see with our physical eyes and what God says is true. We see weakness, but God says, my power is made perfect in weakness.

It doesn't feel that way. But He is telling us something that our eyes and our feelings and our mind does not want to believe. We see suffering.

God says, I am working all things together for good. When you're going through suffering, you almost don't want to hear that.

[20 : 56] You know, God's working all things together for good. No, we need to grieve, we need to suffer, we need to cry out to God, we need to say, God, I don't understand this. We don't say, la-di-di, all things are working together.

No, but realize that all things are working together. But when we're going through grief, go through your griefs, mourn, cry, wail, but call out to God.

We see death, but we know that Jesus has said, I am the resurrection and the life. There will be a resurrection because Jesus is alive.

No, Jesus is no longer walking besides us in the same way he did with these disciples. He has ascended to the Father and through his spirit he is present with us right now.

And he did promise in Matthew 28, I am with you always even to the end of the age. So we can't seem but he is with us always, isn't he? This is not a fairy tale.

[22 : 02] This is not Santa Claus. This is the word of God. we may not recognize what he's doing. We may not understand the road he's chosen for us, but we're never alone.

And faith is learning to interpret what we see by the fuller story of what God is revealing in his word. Faith does not pretend that suffering is not real.

Faith does not deny the diagnosis, the disappointment, the broken relationships, or the grave. Faith recognizes that what we see is real, but it's not the whole story.

We see one chapter, God's got the whole book. Faith allows God's word to interpret what our eyes cannot understand. So God opens our eyes.

He opens our eyes by exposing the stories we're living in, by teaching us his story, and by helping us to recognize that he is present.

[23 : 12] And when God opens and exposes the story we trust and teaches us his story through scripture and opens our eyes, something wonderful happens.

We begin to see reality differently. You know, the story continues. Verse 32, they said to each other, did not our hearts burn within us when he talked to us on the road while he opened to us the scriptures?

And they rose that very hour and returned to Jerusalem. Really? Nothing had really changed. It's seven miles.

It's probably dark. But they are so excited they go all the way back. Jerusalem. Everything had changed.

And what did they do? They go back. My imagination is that they probably ran back. Their despair had turned into joy and hope because they saw him.

[24 : 24] Same road, same circumstances, different eyes. And when God opens our eyes, something happens to us that we can't quite explain.

You know, I used the story to, the road to a maze, but we could have used almost any story in the scriptures to say the same thing.

You remember the story of Joseph? Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, thrown into a pit, stolen to slavery, falsely accused, forgotten in prison. You remember the story of Joseph.

And if Joseph had interpreted his life by what he saw, the evidence around him, he could have said, God has failed me. Look at the mess that my life has turned into.

Where is God? And remember this, this has taken years. This is no overnight thing. God, why do you take so long? I did have a dream.

[25 : 30] Was that a hallucination? Maybe I did misinterpret that. Maybe my brothers were rife for throwing me in that pit that day. But God was writing a bigger story, wasn't he?

The slavery which led to the prison, led eventually to Pharaoh's palace. And the palace was where Joseph needed to be because God had plans for him.

So many years later, Joseph would be able to say to his brothers, you, what you meant for evil, God meant for good, to bring about the many people who would be kept alive.

Sometimes just God, why does he stretch it out so long? But it's his story, he's sovereign.

He's a God of glory. And we're not always going to understand what he's doing, are we? Think about the story of Job.

[26 : 42] Job. God has a conversation with Satan pointing out the example of Job. Job don't know nothing. He doesn't know anything for you English teachers.

He lost everything. He lost his children. He lost his health. He eventually lost the sympathy of his friends. He said, you must have done something. Bad theology.

But Job knew that he hadn't done anything. And he cries out to God and he complains to God and I want my day in court. This isn't fair. I don't like it. I don't know how many years Job suffered.

But I think it was a long time. And he demanded answers from God. And we all know if you've read Job what God does. God comes along and he says, who is this?

Who darkens counsel without knowledge? And God shows him his greatness and his wisdom and his sovereignty and Job shuts up.

[27 : 51] And he says, I heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now I see you. God has to show us, open our eyes.

And sometimes when he opens our eyes, it even shocks us. Shirley and I spent a weekend in a hotel. I was just trying to use my last Marriott points here.

And we were in a hotel in Hamilton place. And I noticed something. I noticed that I was extra friendly. I said, I almost didn't recognize myself.

I don't speak to people in elevators. I don't go down and talk to the person at the front desk. who is this? God was opening my eyes to see something I had never seen before.

Just the humanity of people. I began to see souls. I began to see people. And I began to connect with them in ways I never did before. I said, whoa.

[28:57] And that's a little glimpse of heaven. We're still going to be who we are in heaven. heaven. But we're going to recognize and see things we've never seen before. Pray that God would open your eyes.

I want to leave you with some application. How do we apply this to our lives? First application. Be honest about the story you're living in. This week I want you to finish the sentence. We had hoped. I had hoped.

What do you hope for that God is disappointing you in? Don't hide that. Maybe share it with someone. Because he asks us all the same question.

What story are you telling yourself? Because somehow if you're disappointed, if you're discouraged, if you're complaining, your story is coming into conflict with God's story.

[30:03] And that doesn't, I'm not trying to deny the pain of it. I'm just trying to say go to him and ask him to open your eyes to see better. Secondly, let Jesus interpret your life through scripture.

The disciples did not need new circumstances. They needed Jesus to explain the scriptures. You see, our culture tells us to interpret the Bible through our experience. But Jesus teaches us to interpret our experience through the Bible.

And that means when life says, I've been abandoned, God says, I will never leave you or forsake you. So even when you're thinking God has abandoned me, his word is saying I will never leave you.

Who are you going to believe? When life says, you know, this is pointless, God says, I'm working all things together for good. I don't know if you, well, I want to see the end.

Yeah, yeah, you say that. Now, do I have to wait for heaven? When life says this is a defeat, remember that the cross looked like defeat, but it wasn't.

[31:16] Read your Bible this week asking one simple question. Lord, what are you teaching me to see that I am missing? third, look for the presence of God.

Look for the presence of Christ on the road. The amazing thing about Emmaus is not that Jesus eventually showed up, it's that he had been there all along. He was walking with them and although he's not going to be with us physically, he's, in a sense, he's closer to us than he was to the disciples because he's with us through his Holy Spirit.

So when you go to work, remember he's there. When you sit down at the doctor's office, remember he is there. When you have a difficult conversation and you want to lose it, remember he is there and he loves you and he can control your temper.

And this person isn't as difficult as you think or they might be, but you might be more difficult, but that's okay. Ask him to help you to see these things.

Just be aware of his presence. And I think the thing that we need to continually do as we need to tell our story of the gospel, we need to repent of how we see and trust in Jesus.

[32:48] stop trying to make the story about you. You know the song, you're so vain, I bet you think this song is about you.

See, that's us. We're so vain that we think the story is about us, but it's about Jesus and his glory. remember his death, his resurrection, he is reigning now.

You may not understand the chapter that you're living in, you may be walking on a road that you've never seen before, but if you belong to Christ, your deepest hope has not failed.

Christ died, Christ rose, Christ reigns, and Christ is with you. Let us pray. Our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for your grace, your mercy, your love.

We thank you that your love never fails. Everything else might fail, but your love will never fail. I pray that you would make us aware of your every day, every moment, every instant presence in our lives, and that you would open up our eyes.

[34:14] I pray, Lord Jesus, if there's any here who don't believe, and we all kind of don't believe at a certain level, I pray that you would illuminate them. I pray especially for those who are denying the truth of the scriptures, that you would encourage them to read it and open their eyes to that reality.

I pray for my brothers and sisters who are struggling along with me to believe that every bump in the road, every dent, every difficult, every turn, every crooked thing, you're working out for our good

because you love us.

Help us not to deny the pain that we're going through. Help us to call out to you when we are in that pain. Help us to call out to you for everything, everything that we might think is minor.

It's not minor. You love us. You treasure us. Help us to get that through our minds. That you're not too busy. You're here for us. Illuminate us, Lord.

Teach us to pray. Help us to realize that you are with us always, even to the end of the age.

[35 : 23] I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.